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## CRITICAL NOTICES.

**Histoire du Peuple d'Israël, par Ernest Renan, Tome Troisième.**

Is it worth while to review the *Histoire du Peuple d'Israël*? Who that is interested in the history of that people will not read for himself the representation of it set forth by such a master of style and scenic effect as M. Renan? Still, to indicate the character and charm of his latest volume, as well as to congratulate the veteran author upon its appearance, a few words from this REVIEW may not be out of place.

M. Renan's third volume deals with the best known and least disputed period of Old Testament history, that, namely, which lies between the fall of Samaria and the return from the Babylonian captivity (722-536 B.C.). From the critical point of view there is not much novelty possible. The Assyrian invasion, Isaiah's justified confidence, the reforms of Hezekiah, the reaction of Manasseh, the composition of Deuteronomy, the reform of Josiah, the preaching of Jeremiah, and then the two transportations, with the life of the exiles in Babylon and their two great teachers, Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah, constitute a definite bulk of ascertained material, out of which all historians must construct stories the outlines of which will always remain the same. And yet what extraordinary freshness there is in M. Renan's volume—not a single dull or superfluous page from first to last!

In addition to the fact of genius, which differentiates M. Renan's work from that of all other living writers upon Israel's history or religion, except, perhaps, from Wellhausen's, there are several other reasons for this wonderful freshness and charm. Some of these, indeed the most important of them, are both painful and questionable, but contribute none the less to the startling novelty and suggestiveness of the whole. But apart from them, how often do M. Renan's matchless gifts of style, his wide knowledge of Oriental life, his penetrating intelligence and imagination, suffice to throw new light upon, or bring new meaning into, old facts and records! Students will, I think, find much help-

fulness, for instance, in his account of the growth of the Jerusalem Temple in importance and esteem, of the prophetic *Midrashim* (p. 245) of Ezekiel and his legal visions, and of the teachings of Deutero-Isaiah. Very often they will find an old thought or fact recast in new forms, which make one the better realize its importance. How frequently, *e.g.*, have we been told that the religious destinies of Europe hung upon the fortunes of that band of captives who were led away from their own land into the exile of Babylonia. M. Renan points out that an essential feature of the case was that the captives carried with them : "les vieilles écritures, formant un volume déjà considérable." And then he adds :

Les exilés avaient sûrement des bagages, portés sur des ânes ou des chameaux. Le sort de l'humanité fut attaché durant quelques jours au pied plus ou moins sûr de la bête qui portait le livre sacré de l'avenir (p. 379).

M. Renan's critical position is peculiar. He is a *Graftianer*, but by no means accepts all the conclusions of the most advanced German and Dutch school. His point of view as regards the Pentateuch, by which (like Graf before Kuenen and Riehm had convinced him of his error) he separates the legislative from the narrative portion of the Priestly Chronicle, is already well known. Further odd mixtures of criticism will be noticed in the present volume. M. Renan, for example, accepts Stade's view that Hezekiah's reform did not extend to the removal of the *Bamoth* ; he is ready to assume a number of interpolations in Jeremiah, so that he even goes so far as to say : "Il y a un deutéro-Jérémie, comme il y a un deutéro-Isaïe." But, at the same time, he is able to accept the authenticity of Hezekiah's hymn and of Isaiah xii., to say nothing of xxxii. and xxxiii. Job is a part of the "travail littéraire" under Hezekiah, while an extended use is made of the Psalter for the whole period from Isaiah to the fall of Jerusalem. Thus, Psalms xx., xxi., xxv., ci., are assigned to the reign of Hezekiah ; xxii., xxxvii., lxxiii., xciv., to that of Manasseh ; i., xxiii., lxxxiv., to that of Josiah. Zechariah xii.-xiv. is still retained for the interval between the death of Josiah and the end of the monarchy. It is needless to say that under the master hand of M. Renan these portions of Scripture which, to many of us, seem either of exilic or post-exilic origin, are made to fit most prettily into the place and the time that are assigned to them, but the final impression remains that the author's criticism is unsatisfactory and unequal.

M. Renan alludes in the preface to the blame which his second volume encountered, because he had too frequently made

des rapprochements entre les antiques événements...et les mouvements des temps modernes.

But he declares that he must persist in the practice. For there is no better example than the history of ancient Judaism of the

essential contrariety and opposition between the demands of politics and of socialism. So in his third volume the past is frequently illustrated by the present, or the present criticised by the lessons of the past. Sometimes the parallels are only hypothetical. Thus Jeremiah, in his fierce opposition to the "national" party of resistance against the Chaldæan oppression is compared to

un publiciste français qui, à bonne intention, en 1870, eût appelé les Prussiens les ministres de Dieu, eût applaudi aux défaites amenées par nos fautes, eût prédit pour l'avenir dix fois pis encore si l'on ne s'améliorait (p. 289).

The laws of the Priests drawn up in Babylon were the result of dreamy speculations and socialistic chimæras. They are plans

comme ceux qu'on pouvait élaborer autour de M. le comte de Chambord ou ceux qu'on discute dans les clubs socialistes (p. 413).

M. Renan, indeed, is never weary of emphasizing the socialistic, and therefore impractical, requirements of the prophets and the later legislators. He admires them, while he pities them. They were beating against a rock, and yet humanity requires, and gains from, such a vain battle with necessity. It cannot, he says, be repeated too often that "le véritable analogue des prophètes, en notre temps, ce sont les journalistes du style le plus effréné" (p. 350). The most ancient advocates of the poor and the oppressed were the Prophets of Israel, and it is for this that they are to be assigned so eminent a place in the history of civilization. But their advocacy led them into impossibilities, and made them the destroyers of the State and the enemies of their country. The violence of these "prodigieux agitateurs," "fous sublimes," resembles that of

le démocrate extrême de nos jours, qui ne veut pas faire les dérogations au principe d'égalité nécessaires pour avoir une armée. Une société trop douce est faible ; le monde n'est pas composé de parfaits ; il y a des abus nécessaires (p. 279).

The Hellenism of M. Renan and his realistic instincts alike lead him to combat the ideals of the Prophets and the lawgivers, but yet in other respects he is drawn towards them by the attractive force of their pure morality. The see-saw in his mind is very interesting and stimulative to the reader. The Priestly law, he says,

est une loi de confrérie, non une loi de nation. Elle se rapproche des idées qui dominent dans certains cercles socialistes. Inutile de dire que nulle culture d'esprit, nul art, nulle science, nulle philosophie, aucune de ces fleurs exquisés que la Grèce a fait éclore, ne pouvait sortir d'un tel régime (p. 426).

But, nevertheless, this ideal really demanded the protecting force of an empire like that of Persia, within the shadow of which the brotherhood might live out its dreams. The attitude of the "Jewish socialists" to the outer world fills M. Renan with indignation and

wonder. The world only exists for Israel, but Israel is too often careless of the world.

Quand l'empire qui lui servait d'abri s'écroule, il éclate de rire; il s'écrie que toutes les nations travaillent pour le feu, s'épuisent pour le vide. Il oublie que, sans cet abri d'une grande société civile et militaire, sa Thora serait inapplicable. Toutes les moqueries en sont là (p. 427).

And yet this very phrase from Jeremiah (li. 58) moves him elsewhere to admiration.

La grande ironie, mêlée de pitié, qu'inspire au penseur ce que la pauvre humanité, amoureuse de ses bourreaux, appelle la gloire, ne s'est jamais exprimée par un trait plus énergique. La Grèce a merveilleusement compris les petits plaisirs enfantins de la vie intérieure des cités. Les ruines des grands empires, avec les colères et les larmes qu'elles provoquent; le sentiment supérieur, profondément triste, avec lequel l'homme pacifique contemple ces écroulements; la commisération qu'excite dans le cœur du sage le spectacle des peuples travaillant pour le vide, victimes de l'orgueil de quelques-uns; la vanité de toute chose, et le feu dernier juge des sociétés humaines (ce qui n'exclut pas la foi invincible en un avenir idéal): voilà ce que la Grèce n'a pas su voir; voilà ce que les prophètes juifs ont exprimé avec une sagacité admirable (p. 458).

The figure of Jeremiah seems a perpetual astonishment to M. Renan, and he brings out with admirable force the strange mixture of the man, his weakness (to our modern eyes) as well as his strength. Jeremiah is a prince among "devots," leader of the "piétistes." Now "les dévots se montrent toujours incontentables. Ce qu'on fait pour eux leur était dû; ce qu'on ne fait pas est un crime" (p. 267). And "les piétistes sont essentiellement persécuteurs; ils se plaignent fort quand on les persécute; et pourtant ils trouvent très mauvais qu'on les empêche de persécuter les autres; ils sont si sûrs d'avoir raison!" (p. 120). The violence of Jeremiah's utterances, his imprecations, his perpetual predictions of carnage and destruction, his insistence upon cette horrible doctrine qu'on est coupable si l'on n'accepte pas la tyrannie du jour, censée commissionnée par Dieu" fill M. Renan's gentle heart with horror. He is appalled at

la sympathie que l'homme de Dieu a pour le Tamerlan, qui va tout mettre à feu et à sang. Le Jahvé exterminateur, ayant pour parfait serviteur Attila, voilà l'idéal de Jérémie (p. 287).

And yet this fanatic was a man "d'une moralité sévère." His religious genius was "sans égal"; without him the religious history of mankind "eût suivi un autre tour"; he is the man who "avant Jean-Baptiste" contributed the most "à la fondation du christianisme; il doit compter, malgré la distance des siècles, entre les précurseurs immédiats de Jésus" (p. 154, 251).

The Babylonian Isaiah is naturally of all the prophets the most sympathetic to M. Renan, as he is indeed to almost all of us. He

calls him "le premier des penseurs humanitaires. Nous tous, dont la religion est d'espérer un avenir où l'humanité se consolera enfin de ses souffrances, nous le saluons comme notre maître." The one thing which annoys him in Deutero-Isaiah is delightfully characteristic.

La seule chose qui blesse dans le Second Isaïe, c'est le nom de *Jahvé* (p. 504).

We are not spared in this volume a good deal of M. Renan's usual insistence upon the old, monotheistic Elohimism of the nomad patriarchs, and of his usual bitterness against the false God Yahveh, the God who is "un grand orgueilleux, un jaloux," "un dieu provincial, souverainement injuste."

In this, as in other more fundamental matters, M. Renan's history is very different from the ordinary works of the critical school to which we are accustomed. His point of view is, indeed, I should imagine, different from that of almost any previous writer. There have been books written in open hostility to the Old Testament; there are others, and these are the most common, written more or less strongly from the Christian point of view, and full of "contrasts" between the Old Covenant and the New. M. Renan resembles neither. Again, even the ordinary run of critical historians, however far they may be removed from a dogmatic orthodoxy, all write with a decidedly Theistic and even Christian bias. But M. Renan is neither Christian nor Theist. To him the fundamental doctrine, common to both the Old Testament and the New, of a self-conscious God is an error and a delusion. Standing thus wholly outside the religious beliefs, whether of Isaiah or of Jesus, of Christian or of Jew, he is, in some respects, more capable of taking an impartial estimate both of the Old Covenant and the New. A person who does not believe in a self-conscious God is, perhaps, too distant from the writers of the Bible to thoroughly appreciate them, or do them perfect justice; but from his high platform, removed from the usual contentions of either party, he is yet able to take a wider, more comprehensive survey of the entire religious development from David to St. Paul. It is, at any rate, of extreme interest to learn the assessment placed upon the very various religious teachings of the Old Testament by one who is concerned neither to defend nor to attack; who seeks at most for "analogies," but not for "contrasts."

For M. Renan is thorough-going in his scepticism. The prophets of Israel, he tells us, demanded an unproved belief in their divine message, as superstitious as the superstitions they attacked. In this curious inconsistency they resemble the Protestants of the sixteenth century.

La raison est si faible qu'elle n'a le choix qu'entre les degrés divers de crédu-

lité. Les puritains israélites écartaient les pratiques les plus décidément niaises; ils riaient des gens assez sots pour chercher des révélations dans les voix censées venir du ventre, et ils tenaient pour inspirées les paroles de celui qui, sans un ombre de preuves, se donnait pour prophète de Jahvé. Les Protestants supprimaient les messes et les indulgences, mais gardaient, exagéraient même la révélation de la Bible, les mérites du sang de Jésus-Christ. Ces distinctions qui nous paraissent naïves, sont des conditions de force dans l'action. Pauvre espèce humaine! Comme elle veut le bien! Mais comme elle est, dans son ensemble, peu faite pour la vérité! (p. 188).

Jewish apologists are pained that there is no trace of any doctrine of the immortality of the soul in the Old Testament, and try to read it into all sorts of places which are wholly innocent of this conception. Christian theologians, ignoring the historical genesis and growth of the doctrine, point out in solemn and portentous tones the proper and intended difference between the Old Revelation and the New. M. Renan agrees with neither. To him the doctrine is a "chimère," the peculiar dream of the Aryan races. The Israelites were "advanced" enough to perceive its vanity.

Plus avancés par certains côtés que les autres peuples, les Beni-Israël virent bien que les récompenses et les châtimens d'outre-tombe sont chose vaine, sans réalité (p. 78).

At the same time M. Renan, with his usual curious see-saw (indicative of impartiality or indecision?), assigns to the doctrine an immense value. It is a chimæra, and yet a "chimère avec laquelle seule on fait de grandes choses." To its absence is due the curious fact that the ideal of the Second Isaiah, the man who was "ivre de justice," whose portraiture of the Servant of Yahveh shows us "l'abnégation poussée jusqu'au martyre," is nevertheless only "une vie plantureuse et la longévité." It is only the inherent genius "des grandes races" which has enabled the Semite to triumph over his ideal of "bien-être matériel," so that, in spite of it, his life, endowed with the gift of hope "qui n'appartient qu'à lui," has been "un acte de dévouement continu."

M. Renan's own belief is apparently a kind of mild Pantheism. He is convinced that

tous les systèmes qui aspirent à justifier le gouvernement temporel de la Providence sont condamnés à supposer Dieu inepte, féroce ou jaloux (p. 263).

Thus "autant vaut ne pas essayer de le justifier." M. Renan holds qu'aucune volonté particulière ne gouverne le monde, et que ce qui arrive est le résultat d'un effort aveugle tendant en somme vers le bien (p. 85).

For "la raison suprême" is "inconscient," though of this fact the Hebrew had not "la moindre notion," since

la distinction du conscient et de l'inconscient dans le développement de l'univers ne pouvait être faite alors, puisque, de nos jours, elle est à peine comprise de l'immense majorité des hommes, même instruits (p. 179).

It is perfectly natural that with a theoretic belief such as this, crossed by the conviction that the great achievements of mankind have been owing to delusions and chimæras, there should be in M. Renan's writings a perpetual undercurrent of contemplative sadness. How much of human life is vanity! It must be so, for

en réalité, les surfaces seules existent dans l'humanité; elles sont les apparences; or, en dehors de l'ordre scientifique pur, les choses humaines ne sont qu'apparences. La bataille gagnée est celle qu'on croit gagnée. L'opinion triomphante est celle qui, à une certaine heure, réussit à prouver qu'elle avait le droit de triompher (p. 27).

To combat the mournfulness of life, the disciples of M. Renan have narrow expedients. The main comforts of Aryan and Semite, the life beyond the tomb and the self-conscious God, are alike forbidden. Yet, here again, it is the Semite who has bequeathed to the modern spirit its final resource. It is that of the Psalmist :

les larmes secrètes, l'épanchement du cœur avouant son trouble. Voilà pourquoi les Psaumes, quand tout le reste s'en va, restent notre livre de prières, notre chant intérieur, notre éternelle consolation (p. 253).

Yet, for the mass of mankind, hope, the gift of the Semite, hope, issuing in aspirations and dreams which console by imaginary paradises for the sorrows of reality, will never cease to be necessary, unless humanity should attain that condition of material well-being "qui rend le rêve inutile."

Such is the contradiction of life. What is M. Renan's "conclusion of the whole matter?"

Au milieu de tant de contradictions, ne laissant que le choix de l'erreur, qui peut avoir la prétention d'être sans péché? Celui qui craint de se tromper, et ne traite personne d'aveugle; celui qui ne sait pas au juste quel est le but de l'humanité, et l'aime tout de même, elle et son œuvre; celui qui cherche le vrai avec doute et qui dit à son adversaire: "Peut-être vois-tu mieux que moi;" celui, en un mot, qui laisse aux autres la pleine liberté qu'il prend pour lui. Celui-là peut dormir tranquille et attendre en paix le jugement du monde, s'il y en a un (p. 279).

Solemn words from a noble soul. But perhaps the Aryan with his "chimère d'outre-tombe," and the Semite with his dream of a self-conscious God, saw better than M. Renan.

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